

## ON THE MATERIALIST CONCEPTION OF HISTORY

The MC of H is a theory of history—a theory put forward to explain the struggles, the changes and the developments in history. S.R.P., in his article in the August FORUM, completely ignores this. He should have come down to cases and shown where, in his opinion, it did not fit. Writing of basis and superstructure, integration and interaction, may look profound but it gets him nowhere. He has so wrapped himself round with words and phrases that he has shut himself off from the real world of action and counter-action.

### Historical Development

To begin with, he does not explain why he has put the quotation from Mumford at the head of his article. What is it supposed to convey? Unless we analyse a machine into its parts how can we gain “any insight” into the pattern or purposive configuration that endows them with special significance? Anyhow, what has it to do with the application of the MC of H?

I would be interested to know why he calls his article “A Critique of Historical Materialism” but says nothing in it about the historical element. There is not a single criticism throughout his article of the application of the MC of H. He is up in the clouds all the time. After all, it is a materialist conception of *history*; and history is a relating of things that have happened in fact and not phantasy. It is a theory put forward to explain the changes and direction of social development; why the Athenian Empire developed and then collapsed; what brought about the internal struggles and collapse of the Roman Empire; why Feudalism grew out of that collapse, and how Capitalism developed out of Feudalism. Has S.R.P. a new theory to explain the

cause of modern war, and the class struggles of to-day and the past? If the MC of H does not give us a clear picture and an explanation of past epochs, will S.R.P. explain where it has failed to do so and put the picture right? Let him tell us what he thinks brought about the struggles of the Cromwellian period, the American War of Independence, the French Revolution, the American Civil War and the social struggles in Germany, if he believes that the MC of H does not do so. Let him get down to earth.

In his first paragraph S.R.P. tells us that as good a summary of the MC of H as any ‘is Engels’ view that of all the factors determining historical development ‘the decisive element is pre-eminently the production and reproduction of life and its material requirements’. Then there is a full stop, and not a single criticism of this statement in his article. Just for the record let us call his attention to the fact that, in the above statement, of the *many factors* determining historical development *one* of the factors is decisive; that is all it says.

In his second paragraph he takes three quotations from Marx and then adds—“we are being asked to accept the separation of ideas from the material world”. Whatever “we are being asked to accept”, what is wrong with the three quotations? S.R.P. does not tell us. He plays about with ‘parts’ and ‘wholes’, with ‘interaction’ and ‘integration’, and so on.

Let us take a look at his first quotation—“the ideal is nothing other than the material world reflected by the human mind.” What else is the ideal than this? If S.R.P. is making the fatuous contention that because we can’t have the human mind without the material world, it is all of a piece, and

therefore we cannot distinguish one from the other, then he has reached a point where he is temporarily incapable of really understanding anything that is put forward on the subject. Are we to take it that as we cannot have buses without people, roads and destinations then, if we want to discuss the construction of buses, we are asserting that we can separate buses from people, roads and destinations?

### Formation of Ideas

In all statements a reasonable interpretation must be taken for granted, otherwise every statement would have to be qualified and qualified until it became a book. In the statement in question Marx took for granted that the reader would understand that he was referring to the mind and the world outside of it. The mind, or the brain, or whatever you like to call the thinking faculty, is that part of the world which pictures, analyses, and generalises about the rest of the world. We are born with the faculty of thinking, just as we are born with the faculty of moving our limbs. In order to think we must have material to think about, and this material comes from the world around us. We are not born with ideas, they are developed out of our contacts with the world. According to the MC of H our principal contact with the world concerns “the production and reproduction of life and its material requirements” and S.R.P. has not denied this. Hence, the formation of ideas can only be explained in terms of practice, and the principal part of our practice consists in getting a living. Even the wildest ideas are built up out of the world around, only the parts are stuck together in an incongruous manner—like sticking a fish’s tail on to a woman’s torso in order to make up an ideal mermaid.

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I can't chase every drugged hare S.R.P. has raised, none of which has anything to do with the application of the MC of H, so I will only concern myself here with one or two more.

### Basis and Superstructure

He is in a jam over basis and superstructure. The basis is that part upon which the other part rests—in buildings the foundation. Someone wrote somewhere in FORUM that superstructure suggests something flimsy—I thought of the Woolworth building, the Battersea Power Station, St. Paul's, the Houses of Parliament and other superstructures! The fact that we can't have a building with only a foundation, or only a superstructure, is no reason why we can't divide it into basis and superstructure. Further, the nature of the foundation is the principal factor in determining the size and shape of the superstructure.

Now let us turn to society. If, in a particular society, cultivation, construction and the rest of the social work is performed by slave labour then it is proper to state that that particular society is based upon slave labour, because without the slave labour that form of society would not exist. Furthermore, the nature of the relations of all those within that society—master and slave, legal enactments and the rest—is determined by this slave labour basis, and the ideas of the time are moulded by it. If S.R.P. has any doubt about this latter point he should look up Aristotle or Cicero, Demosthenes or

Martial, or, in later times, the protagonists of the Southern States of America before the Union.

We are out to build a new social form. What is the basis upon which the new society will be built? *That everything that is in and on the earth will be the common possession of all mankind.* That will be the basis of the new society, and upon that basis there will be a super-structure of relations and performances in harmony with it. In other words, the most important factor of the new society will be this basis, because without it we cannot build up the superstructure we want, as it will determine, in the main, the nature of the superstructure.

### Material Conditions

Later in his article S.R.P. accuses me of a contradiction. Alas, he does not think sufficiently over what he reads. Let me assist him. "Social progress is the result of the mental activity of man exerting itself on the material provided by the external environment." Out of this mental activity man derives certain ideas. Thus "ideas are the product of conditions and not the other way round." It is the interaction of man's thinking faculty and his environment that produces ideas, but the nature of the ideas is determined by the material about which he thinks, the conditions of his time.

At the end of his article, S.R.P. tells us that material conditions will become more like Socialism as time goes by, and that the acceleration of the resulting Socialist ideas

will be the Socialist Revolution. Now what does he mean by that in terms of the actual? Does he mean that private property, classes, wars and the rest, will gradually disappear? If so, let him spread himself and tell us in fact, in terms of property, classes, wars and so on, what he really does mean. And while he is doing so he must remember that an important part of the material conditions is the way the working class is thinking. I notice that, in spite of his superior and mistaken prods at separating man from his environment, he separates thinking from material conditions.

Which reminds me. S.R.P. says that "It is inconceivable to me that the socialist idea will grow without a correlative development of material conditions approximating closer to Socialism". What am I to understand by this, that S.R.P. is not yet a socialist or that he is a superman? Where did he get his socialist ideas from?

Finally let me remind him once more that the subject of his article, in spite of the title, is the MC of H. Show us where it has failed, and show us any reputable modern historian who does not base his description of past epochs upon the use of it.

GILMAC

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## A DIALOGUE

Comrade Spencer: Of course one of our troubles is that we have a theory of history but don't apply it to the coming of socialism. That is one important reason why so many people say we are not really Marxist.

Comrade Marks: On the contrary, I would say that we are the only Marxists. Not only do we understand the theories but we apply them and act in harmony with them.

S. Perhaps if I give you an example of what I mean you will show me where I am mistaken.

M. Yes, certainly.

S. Well now, take the MCH for example. It shows broadly that new attitudes to morality, politics, human nature, life in general, can only be explained from changes in the prevailing mode of production—the economic foundation of society. That within each past social system, conditions have

arisen which have undermined the old ways of doing things; and made new ideas and attitudes necessary.

M. Ah! now, stop there. Just let me elaborate on that to make sure you understand what you are saying. Take Feudalism for example. Production was mainly for local use, not for wide exchange. The obligation of the exploited peasant was fulfilled by him giving part of what he produced, or part of his labour-time, to the church and/or the local landowner. Morality helped to preserve this relationship, and many others, such as the peasant being tied to the land. In course of time, with changes in the method of production, etc., the local fair or markets became increasingly important in the lives of people and gradually there emerged a new class living by buying and selling goods—the merchant capitalist class; ultimately, of

course, goods began not only to be sold for profit but *produced for that purpose*—the capitalist motive for production. This required a free working class and the old ways of doing things were broken down. Morality also was changed—for example, in its attitude to money-lending and producing things for profit. So we see, comrade, the MCH is proved to the hilt in its application to history. It is in fact our guide or key to its mysteries.

S. Splendid, comrade; a first class statement; now would you do one thing for me—apply the same historical principle to the emergence of socialism.

M. Surely that is self-evident. With the development of capitalism from small units to large scale production the contradiction between social production and private ownership becomes ever more glaring. The working class is compelled to organise to preserve itself, and ultimately to establish conditions of life in harmony with the new ways of



doing things. The new productive forces today, hampered and restricted by capitalist relationships, will then operate freely to satisfy the needs of all. In order to achieve this new world, we must first get people to understand and want it. Until then capitalism and all the problems that go with it will remain.

S. Do you mean then that the new relationships between people can only emerge after the old ways have been completely swept away? That you cannot have the new relationships existing side by side with the old and becoming ultimately the dominant ones?

M. Exactly.

S. Then you have not applied the principle at all. In what you said about the emergence of capitalism from Feudalism you showed that new methods of production and new relationships evolved within the old feudal framework and that a commodity society emerged "within the womb of the old society" as Marx put it. But when you come to socialism you throw this overboard and assert that the new mode of production cannot emerge within the old society. Earlier you showed that new moral attitudes arose and triumphed as a result of the needs of a new economic class, with their method of doing things already existing and growing. Now you have dropped this; you haven't shown what new class has come on the scene, you haven't shown what new mode of production they are initiating or representing. *In fact, in every important aspect you have violated the principle you were supposed to be applying.* How do you explain that?

M. What you don't understand, Comrade, is that whilst the revolution from feudalism to capitalism was a revolution from one property society to another, the socialist revolution is one from a property society to a non-property society. It should be obvious that whilst different kinds of property societies can co-exist, socialism, common-ownership, cannot exist within a private ownership world.

S. Be that as it may, the MCH, which you claimed you were applying, gives no historical precedent for the emergence of socialism as you see it coming. *The only kind of change it describes or caters for is for a new social system to emerge within the womb of the old.* I therefore conclude that you are not applying the MCH but have some other justification for your views.

M. But my justification is the MCH. We know that societies come and go. That in the past new revolutionary classes have emerged from the exploited in Society, and have revolutionised their world. *Every day we see that the only solution to the problems is for the mode of production to become*

socialist. That, as in the past, the forces of production must be unleashed from their fetters, by the only exploited class left, the working class. I therefore conclude that the working class must organise to achieve the social revolution, the culmination of the class struggle: and you say that it violates the MCH. Comrade, I am afraid that you are very confused indeed.

S. I think we have reached stalemate here. I maintain that the MCH tells us how societies have changed in past history and I say that our ideas of how the new society will emerge should be in harmony with the MCH if we claim to be Marxist. Socialism, if it is to emerge at all, will do so within the womb of capitalism. If not socialism,—then some other society. I can see no justification for the view that the new world will come as a result of people making a sudden break with the old.

M. Now don't misunderstand me, comrade. The fact that the change from the capitalist to the socialist mode of production is sudden, does not mean that the process of maturing of people's ideas towards socialism is not a gradual process. Surely the existence of the S.P. shows that the changes in the ideas of more and more people is a lengthy process. When we have the majority on our side, however, the qualitative change takes place, the revolution in the mode of production. This idea of quantity-quality change is completely Marxian as you must surely know. It is in that sense that Socialism matures in the womb of the old society—no other.

S. But if we explain people's present attitudes and ideas as appropriate to the kind of conditions they live in, it is only right to think that ideas can only change as institutions change and institutions change as ideas change. But you are saying that capitalism will remain fundamentally unchanged until we get socialism and in spite of this, people's ideas will change fundamentally before we get socialism. Surely this is a separation of thought and action that racial hatreds and nationalism from the existence of society organised along private property lines in which groups struggle and compete for a place in the sun. These attitudes we say must be expected where capitalism exists. This applies to those attitudes and a host of others. Now, comrade, you are saying in the next breath that you can keep the social system that produces these attitudes, and within that system (which depends for its existence on those attitudes) have a vast mass of people with the socialist outlook. Surely you cannot maintain that, with capitalist conditions as they are, you can have a vast socialist movement.

M. I'll go this far with you, comrade. In my opinion capitalist development has a long way to go before we get a socialist working-class, although I'm quite certain the position I take up is fundamentally sound although you may be able to criticise superficially here and there.

S. Well comrade, that really begs the question. Anyway we will continue it another time. **OPTIMUS**

## NOTES ON CRISES (3)

What can be said of all under-consumption theories, past and present, is that because they make an abstract separation of production from consumption and supply from demand, they are unable to give an adequate explanation of crises. To put it another way, the underconsumption theorists see society essentially from the standpoint of consumption, and fail to see that the consuming power of society is subordinated to a form of income distribution generated by a particular set of social relations called capitalism. That is why the under-consumption theory tends to disregard the fact that in the relationship between production and consumption, it is consumption which plays a subordinate role.

Recent trends in economic theory emphasises, however, the primacy of supply over demand and the precedence of conditions of production over conditions of distribution as a

prerequisite for any realistic analysis of present day society. Indeed this 'recent trend' sees "Market demand" and "consumers' choice" not in unreal abstraction but as factors which stand in a dependent relationship to production. So while a subjective theory of value—whose underlying assumptions rest on a pain/pleasure principle—might still be entrenched in the citadels of academic teaching, its inability to explain the significance and movement of economic events is generally recognised.

One other point might be made in passing; that the advocates of naïve under-consumption theories put themselves into something of a dilemma. If it is true that there is insufficient purchasing power generated to buy back the goods which have been produced, then it follows that lack of effective demand must be a characteristic feature of the economic



situation. The most significant question then to ask is not how crises start, but how it can ever be possible for booms to begin?

While Marx recognised the conflict between the productive powers of capitalist society and the distribution of its products, for him it was but an aspect of the more basic conflict between the productive forces and the productive relations of capitalism. It was in the detailed analysis of this basic conflict of capitalism that Marx sought to discover the prime agencies which bring capitalist production into crisis.

That is why Marx never treated crises in terms of supply and demand, i.e., productive output and aggregate consuming power. For him these were merely a facet of a many-sided economic situation. To view them as the whole would give a partial and distorted picture of the conditions which bring about crises. While a deficit of market demand stresses the antagonistic relations of production and consumption in capitalism, it cannot explain them. It can only serve as an expression of the underlying conflict of productive class relations. Because the underconsumptionists fail to see this they mistake the symptom for the disease; they fail to see that relative over-production merely reveals, and does not initiate, a rupture in the normal process of capitalist production.

But, it may be objected, surely consumption cannot be disregarded, no matter what form of society it is? Even capitalism cannot be based on production *per se*? It is true, of course, that the aim and end of all production must be the appropriation of use values, and capitalist society is no exception to the rule. Yet it is true to say that capitalism is so constituted that while of necessity it must produce use values, its motive for production is exchange value. This antithesis between use value and exchange value is its basic contradiction.

Let us see how it works out in practice. Capitalism being a profit-motivated society, any sharp fall in profit expectation evokes a general reaction from capital investors in the form of the curtailment of investment, and hence production; as a result the rate and flow of capital accumulation is choked off. When this is of sufficient magnitude, crisis conditions emerge. Because capitalism is a profit-extracting system, the rate of profit has a vital connection with the rate of capitalist accumulation. If there is a profit incentive, then capital accumulation will expand; and consequently production. If there is no profit incentive, then accumulation will contract, and production also.

The requirements of capital accumulation set, then, limits of expansion of the productive apparatus. Not because of lack of pro-

ductive labour, or exhaustion of economic resources, but due to its need to inhibit any encroachment on capital funds as the result of a decline in the rate of profit. It is when investment has outrun any further profitable utilization of the existing technical and productive methods on a sufficient scale that crises conditions emerge.

Again, because capitalism is not a system based upon production for consciously designed social ends, but for profit extraction, it also sets limits to the level of employment and the size of the pay rolls, i.e., purchasing power. The expansion and contraction of production (whether it be violent as in booms and slumps or only the incidental fluctuations of industry) is not regulated by changes in purchasing power, but changes in purchasing power are themselves the result of the inherent compulsions of capitalism—its own law of motion. Capitalism does not then produce too much or too little purchasing power even though a surface view seems to indicate it. In actual fact, the way capitalism generates aggregate purchasing power at particular times is subordinated to the essential requirements of its economy. (The consumption of the capitalist class will be dealt with later in this respect, but it does not invalidate or seriously qualify what has been said).

Capitalists will strongly react to adverse changes in the rate of profit, and curtailment of investment is one of the ways of compensating for this. Curtailed production means not that too much wealth has been produced, but too much capital. Capital has become temporarily redundant and with it wage labour as exploitable material. It is here that the reverse side of the picture comes into view—decline in employment and reduction in pay roll. Not because nature is niggardly and population presses hard on the means of subsistence, but because the volume of investment is inconsistent with profit expectation. "The real barrier of capitalist production is capital itself."

At the peak of the boom, just when the powers of production seem capable of being geared to the absolute consuming requirements of society, a halt is called. Just as soon as the mass of producers are on the verge of a real improvement in their standards of living, they are denied the fruit of their efforts and the labour market is "glutted". Thus capitalism, in the way it functions, inhibits the progressive and uninterrupted development of the productive and technical forces of society, and consequently the continued and increasing improvement of living standards for the wealth producers. The loss in capital values and the decline in the ratio of constant to variable capital, i.e., allowing more primitive methods to become profitable

again, are one of the necessary conditions for a boom.

Capitalism is, then, a system of organised scarcity and must remain so. Only in this sense can it be said that capitalism has its font in underconsumption an underconsumption which is not inconsistent with, but inseparable from, and indispensable for, its continuance.

All this, however, has little relevance to underconsumption theories. Underconsumption theory does not critically examine the structure of productive class relations, but contents itself with an analysis of what it thinks is a flaw in the distributing mechanism of the present order. Just as crises are the result of deficient purchasing power, so they can be cured by making good that deficit in some way or other. An examination of the claims made by Hobson, Keynes and the "Welfare" economists would, at the present, take us too far from the subject. What can be said is that their beliefs are rooted in the fiction that capitalism is a productive system motivated by social ends.

In the light of what has been said, one cannot fit Marx's views on crises into any past or present underconsumption theories. The one passage which might be given an underconsumptionist twist is that which occurs when, criticising the view that shortage of capital causes crises, he interpolates with the

#### EDITORIAL

With this issue, FORUM enters upon its third year of life. It is better now, we feel, than it has ever been. But there is still room for much improvement—and here you can help. We need more articles on such things as better public speaking, where speakers can hand on hints and tips that they have found useful to other speakers; new scientific developments of interest to Socialists; notices of books which members think may be useful to Socialists for one reason or another; and so on. We also want more articles from young comrades, and those who have not written before. All except one of the contributors this month is already a contributor to the S.S., and we want to encourage new writers to come out of hiding. Writing for FORUM can be excellent practice for writing in the S.S. Members can also help to make FORUM fulfil its proper function by reading it thoroughly and by criticising what they read *in writing*, by sending letters in to us about it. FORUM can be either a help or a hindrance to the work of the Party. It all depends on the kind of support it gets from Party members in general. With the right kind of support from members and branches, FORUM can be one of the best things the Party has ever done.



remarks: "The last cause of all real crises remains the poverty and restricted consumption of the masses as compared with the tendency of capitalist production to develop the productive forces in such a way that only the absolute power of consumption of the entire society would be their limit". (Vol. 3).

But against this must be noted all that he said about crisis elsewhere. Finally, there is his explicit repudiation of Rodbertus' view that crises are caused by lack of paying consumption:—"It is purely a tautology to say that crisis are caused by the scarcity of solvent consumers, or of a paying consumption. The capitalist mode of production does not know any other mode of consumption but a paying one, except that of the pauper or of the 'thief'. If any commodities are unsaleable it means that no solvent purchasers have been found for them, in other words, consumers (whether commodities are bought in the last instance for productive or individual consumption). But if one were to clothe this tautology with a semblance of profounder justification by saying that the working class receive too small a portion of their own product and the evil could be remedied by giving them a larger share of it, or by raising wages, we should reply that crises are always preceded by a period in which wages rise generally and the working class actually get a larger share of the annual product intended for consumption. From the advocates of simple (!) common sense such a period should remove a crisis. It seems, then, that capitalist production comprises certain conditions which are independent of good or bad will and permit the working class to enjoy that relative prosperity only momentarily, and at that always as a harbinger of a coming crisis." (Vol. 2, pp. 475-6).

There are other factors bound up with the emergence of crises, i.e., existing wage levels, the extent of unemployment and its influence as a competitive force on the labour market, also the extent to which new sources of cheap labour can be tapped. These will be dealt with later.

Finally, of the general propositions in respect of the cause of crises, there are the two most important which have not yet been mentioned, "the anarchy of production" and "the disproportionality of production". Without relating all that has been said to these two fundamental features of capitalism, an adequate understanding of crises is impossible. In fact, one can go so far as to say that, whatever the type of crisis that emerges, it can be shown to be, in one way or other, an aspect of disproportionality. But an examination of these two features of capitalist production will have to be left to the next issue.

E.W.

## IMPROVING THE SOCIALIST CASE

### 11 The Declaration of Principles

This is the first of a series of four articles, the purpose of which is to clarify and collate some of the criticism that has been made by members of its formal principles and their implications. The first two articles will be a detailed critical examination of the D. of P. itself; the third will be a discussion of what the function of a socialist party involves; and, finally, some indication will be given of possible alternatives to the present principles.

#### Clause 1

The Party provides, in its pamphlet *Principles and Policy*, "an explanation, as simple as possible, of our Declaration of Principles." The first clause deals with the basis of Capitalism, and is an application of the M.C.H. Its analysis of society is a materialist analysis. It starts with what it considers to be the basis (private ownership of the means of living) and builds the superstructure (everything else) upon it. For example, "the possession of the means of living by a class sets up the wages system . . . sets up the whole range of relationships between employer and employed . . ." Even commodities are a "striking characteristic of the present social system (that) arises out of this basic property condition." (p.8)

The quarrel with this kind of explanation is that it implies a wrong conception of what a social system is. Society is not a pyramid built upon a particular form of ownership of means of living, nor indeed it is built upon any other basis. It is an *organism*, which means that the parts of which it is composed are interdependent upon each other, and that they are to be understood only in relation to the whole.

Admittedly this indicates that an understanding of society is a rather more complex matter than Clause 1 makes it. It is as well to remember, however, that the oversimplified "this arises out of that" kind of explanation makes us, not society itself, simple. Having made a faulty diagnosis we prescribe a wrong remedy—we say that only the basis, not the whole social fabric, is the concern of the Socialist Revolution.

#### Clause 2

"Men cannot witness the *strengthening* of the barrier which shuts them *ever more completely* out from the circle of luxury, leisure and comfort without becoming

more clearly conscious of the class division." (p.13 my italics)

This makes the growth of class consciousness dependent on the class division becoming more marked. It is a dangerous argument for socialists to use, because the class division has only to remain the same or to narrow and that "incentive" to Socialism disappears. This type of propaganda creates the impression that people should resent being shut out from the "circle of luxury, leisure and comfort", i.e. should resent not being capitalists. It is extremely doubtful whether "becoming more clearly conscious of the class division" has very much to do with becoming a socialist. A worker may realise how different his lot is from that of the capitalist, but, lacking knowledge of and desire for Socialism, he may do nothing to change these social relationships.

The pamphlet's explanation of this clause concludes

"So the class struggle, as time goes on, assumes a different aspect, in strict correspondence with the changing visage of capitalism. When the capitalist class stood as revolutionaries at the inception of the capitalist system, their victory was essential to further progress. But when they had overgrown the reactionary system of the period and established a new social system, that system in its turn, and the class who ruled under it, became reactionary.

And as this reactionary character has become more pronounced, as the system and the class have become a greater clog to progress and more fruitful of social injury, so the character of the class struggle becomes revolutionary. While the fight for the possession of the wealth produced under the system is not less bitterly maintained, the class struggle finds its highest expression in the movement for the overthrow of the capitalist system of society, and the establishment of a new system in which economic interests will be in harmony.

This, then, is the true meaning of our statement that there exists a class struggle in society. It is a struggle on the one side to maintain and on the other side to abolish a social system." (p.13)



As the capitalist system and class become "more reactionary", so the class struggle becomes "more revolutionary", and in support of this contention we are asked to consider the change from feudalism to capitalism. This popular comparison is a fruitful source of error. Note:

1. Although the class struggle is supposed to change as capitalism changes, it is also the Party case that capitalism doesn't basically change. ["The present base started in essentially the same form that it now possesses, and it must retain that form until it finishes its career." (p.24)]. Is it not reasonable, therefore, to argue that the class struggle doesn't basically change?

2. That the capitalist class stood as revolutionaries to the reactionary system (feudalism) is strictly true—but they *only became the capitalist class* to the extent that feudal relations were superseded. The members of this revolutionary movement, as of all revolutionary movements, derived their status from the new society, not the old.

3. The working class as *such* do not stand as revolutionaries to the reactionary system of capitalism—they are constituted as the working class only in relation to that system and within it.

4. The "clog to progress" referred to must be progress to classless society. In order to make the working class the "progressives" the pamphlet changes the character of the class struggle and the fight for possession of wealth becomes the fight to overthrow the system.

5. If the "true meaning" of the class struggle is that the contestants are for and against capitalism, it follows that workers are socialists and capitalists are anti-socialists. In reality, most workers support capitalism, whereas a capitalist has been known to be a socialist. This is because there are two struggles, one an economic struggle between capitalists and workers in regard to the running of capitalism, and the other a struggle of ideas in regard to the establishment of Socialism.

#### Clause 4

Why the assertion that "the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom"? Has the other class already achieved its freedom, or does the clause refer only to subject classes? The pamphlet does not enlighten us. Perhaps we should start with another line of questioning. Why is "the emancipation of the working class" made the starting point? To what extent is all mankind involved?

From the standpoint of the Party's object, we might reasonably infer that working-class emancipation is only a part of a larger whole,

namely the emancipation of all mankind. But then we are set another riddle: why is the part, not the whole, made the object?

The only satisfactory explanation seems to be that the Party is determined to present its case as an appeal to the working class. The reason for making the distinction between working-class emancipation and all mankind's emancipation is that the former is supposed to be an immediate object, and the latter a consequence and therefore a more remote object. Whenever an object is divided in such a way (as, for example, into lower and higher stages) it is because the higher is thought to be "too utopian", "too extreme", "impracticable".

The reasoning goes something like this: "What is the best way to interest people in Socialism? Answer—talk to them in their own language, see things from their angle. Never mind that this is capitalist language and a class angle. Take advantage of that—make it a class appeal. Leave

the trickier part about a new society and all men being equal until later".

Probably few members would agree that they reason in this way. That is not the point. We have to discover the reasoning behind the D. of P. Today, fifty years after it was written, we can detect, if we can bear to look, just how far we have left it behind. That we have not left it farther behind pays a great tribute to the farsightedness of its authors. It must be remembered that the D. of P. was written prior to the existence of any real socialist organisation. This helps to account for the fact that Clause 4 is written from the working-class standpoint (which pertains to the present) rather than from the all-mankind standpoint (which pertains to Socialism). We can change this emphasis by putting "the emancipation of all mankind" in its rightful place—as the prime object.

(to be continued)

S.R.P.

## REFLECTIONS ON THE GROWTH OF THE SOCIALIST IDEA

In reflecting on history in general and the changes that have taken place in forms of society, most of us find no difficulty in following those changing forms in the field of production and general economics together with the political 'set up' that accompanied them and indeed 'fathered' the next change in economic change.

We begin to suffer with blurred vision, however, when we begin to analyse the question of Ideas and the world of philosophy in relation to the world of action, and S.R.P. demonstrates this quite well in his query on the importance or otherwise of the cut and dried and neatly parcelled formula of the M.C.H. so beloved of the orthodox Marxist. His criticism is timely and comes at an opportune moment when so many ideas prevailing in the minds of members are being given air in FORUM.

Socialists are of course, for the moment, theorists; they cannot be otherwise in a world not yet given over to applied socialism, and their theories belong to the world of Ideas. *If and where Socialism becomes a fact then it will be the result of the acceptance of the Idea.* Ideas—when all is said about them—cannot exist in a vacuum—they must have soil in which to grow, and the soil is the world of men and women, together with the accompanying environment.

The Socialist Idea as we now know it is an old-fashioned plant and has gone through

various stages of growth. If we care to glance at the growth of the Socialist Idea we should begin with early forms that derived nourishment from ethical sources, both pagan and christian. Virgil yearns for a return to the way of life of primitive communism when "no fences parted fields, no bounds divided acres of litigious grounds but all was common. Together with Seneca and Josephus and other philosophers of nature, the early Christian thinkers interpreted the inequalities of their age as symbolical with the mythology of Cain and Abel—Cain personifying the man of possessions, and Abel the shepherd exploiting the pastures of the earth while occupying none.

The advent of Christianity in an organized manner, representing a combination of Greek philosophy and Jewish monotheistic ethics, expressed also a form of communist doctrine that appealed to the poor. Paul is quoted as saying "all were of one heart, neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own but that they held all things in common."

This early ethical doctrine of equalitarianism can be traced through to the Middle Ages and up to the present time. John Ball in the 14th century denounced the corruption of the Church as being the chief villain responsible for the economic position of the peasantry in such speeches as the following: "My good people, things cannot go well in



England until all goods are held in common . . . and we shall all be equal . . . they have handsome manners while we must brave the rain and wind in the fields and it is from our labour that they get the means to support their pomp." Ball was hanged for his pains.

Thomas More in the 16th century, preached the evils of money:

"Money is the root of all evil. All crime would die if money perished. Attempts at palliation by reform measures must lead to nought. *The only remedy is a complete*

*change of the whole social system.*" (our italics).

Objections may be raised at referring to anything outside the scientific socialism, based on Marxist materialism, being called socialism. These early teachings were sincere attempts at alleviating distress and called upon social participation to bring it about; in that sense they were socialistic. Let us never forget in the course of our modern teaching with its highly scientific explanations and jargon-ridden formulae, that these early

reformers were men of ideas acutely "tuned in" to their environment. What they did is what socialists are doing to-day. Our socialism is really very simply a better world for humanity to live in with the ending of exploitation.

It appears, therefore, as S.R.P. says, that it is socialist ideas and action arising from them that will bring about Socialism—always bearing in mind that ideas must have the material world in which to grow.

W. BRAIN

## THE NATURE OF THE SOCIALIST REVOLUTION

### 7—The Socialist Movement (continued)

The expansion of human knowledge is marked by the establishment, in one field after another, of 'laws' which express predictable, deterministic relations, in place of freedom, choice, chance, will or wish: spirits which please themselves are replaced by necessity which can't. The elucidation of 'law' in social relationships, and in the evolution of these relationships (history), is Marx' contribution to sociology. In this field, more particularly than in others, the induction of the 'laws' which integrate facts or phenomena reflects the actual integrative processes of the objective social world. Before the two-fold character of the commodity (usefulness and value) could be clearly distinguished in theory, the actual polarisation between commodities and money had had to be completed socially, out of the various forms of exchange in which, in earlier times, these elements had been fused, more or less. Before labour-power could be clearly distinguished from labour, the commodity form of labour-power had had to become the sole and universal form, out of the mixed and intermediate forms of earlier times. Before abstract homogeneous labour could be perceived as the substance of value, the multiple character of craftman's labour (say, in making shoes from start to finish) had had to be reduced, by manufacture, into the simpler operations of push and pull.

This close correspondence between the philosophical and the social integrations is equally apparent in Marx's wider application of labour theory to history in general, by which he lays bare (see Prefaces to 'Capital') the "law of motion of modern society", dis-

covers "the natural laws of its movement" viewed as "a process of natural history", shows "the necessity of successive determinate orders" governed by laws "independent of human will", "tendencies working with iron necessity towards inevitable results", and states explicitly in 'Capital' that "the absolute, general law of capitalist development is the increased productivity of labour", and implicitly ('German Id.', 'Crit. of Polit.' Ec., etc.) that the dynamic of history is the creative character of human labour.

These philosophical integrations reflect the reduction of class struggles, within the unified nation State, to a simple dichotomy. But they also reflect the incompleteness of the social integration, both within the physiology of society (class struggle), and in the disarticulate anatomy (conflict of national powers). Marx reflects the dichotomy, even to the polarisation of the social scientist and the political platform Communist whose eyes have seen the glory and the terrible swift sword. Thus, history is "governed by laws independent of human will", but "the time has come to change it". Or again, "the dissolution of old ideas keeps even pace with the dissolution of old conditions", but "sooner or later the relations of production come into conflict with the forces of production". The social scientist who warns us that he uses the terms landlord and capitalist only as "personifications of economic categories" reverts, as political Communist, to the personalising of social processes: "the whole history of mankind . . . has been a history of class struggles"; or (in determining the 'normal' working day) "an antinomy results which only

force can decide"; and the grand sum of social interrelations, Socialism, is reduced, for the Communist, to Dictatorship.

The personalising of social forces disintegrates the social science whose materialist determinism is made possible only by its resolving of personal relations into statistical regularities (institutions). This still remains the weakness of the Socialist movement, but irreversible enlargement of the social processes which in Marx' time were writ smaller (the further depersonalising of capital, out of accumulation; further diffusion of equality, from mass of use-values), re-shapes the social determinants of socialist thinking. The Dictatorship in the Manifesto of 1848 does not appear in the Manifesto of 1905; counter-revolutionary violence is reduced from a probability to a hypothesis; and now even the hypothesis is challenged, as a concept of revolution emerges which does not have to adjudicate between 51% and the last Hottentot, or between snowball and avalanche. The Socialist movement conceives the revolution first as coercive, then as legal, and from then on as social; from then on also it begins to conceive the act as a process.

Every advance in science is a verbal achievement, because the homespun language of everyday life lacks the precision which science requires. The Socialist movement is therefore a struggle also for the verbal determinants of socialist thinking. We lack the terms for expressing the metabolism which digests into institutions the plankton of artifactually-determined daily acts, and the osmotic function of institutions which filter varying activity into common outlook.



Because we cannot hold in sharp verbal focus the idea that the substance of mind (beneath the thin cortex which deduces) is the unconscious induction from the minutiae of activity, we still think of thinking as having "independence" (and therefore as "reacting", and therefore at that point "decisive"), and still do not see activity as the substance of society, and that since activity is determined by the things acted on and with, the roots or growing points of society are the products of production. Our political language has moved from the pictographic to the hieroglyphic, but hardly yet to the alphabetic; thus, while history with us is no longer a chaos of events self-determined or accidental, our determinant categories are still "class relations" and "ideas" and "modes of production", which are intermediate categories, distinctively shaped crystals of the same molecules and not themselves "related", but undergoing concurrent molecular change with the continuous creation of atoms (artifacts). *And the effort at reduction to a new simplicity cannot be waved aside as word-play, for we deny our own thesis if we do not accept our present controversies as historically determined and therefore as socially portentous.*

Meanwhile, differences of opinion, as on the question whether "each society has its own laws of economic development", are largely verbal, classificatory. Once it is understood that such a view is justified within a given taxonomy, it need not conflict with the effort to raise generalisation to another level, as an enlargement of thought which enables us to see not only the dynamic effects, within Capitalism, of the profusion (and hence diffusion) of use-values, but to see this also as a particular capitalist form of a general trend of social evolution; that is, to see the movement towards Socialism as inhering in the act of production.

Capitalism repeats in another plane the theme of earlier class societies where, in each case, it is the proliferation of products which compels the droplet changes in detailed process which coalesce into new techniques which integrate into new modes of production, concurrently precipitating new classes and dissolving old ones, as a diverted stream may ruin some and enrich others. The settled three-field economy of Feudalism, as compared with the locust nomadism of communist tribes, raised the output of trading surpluses whose accretion transformed feudal society "economically", "socially" and "ideologically" step by step and hand in hand, as accretion of capital does to-day. The

world-wide Feudal or Staende relations were not abolished by decree, but dissolved century-slow in crucibles of silver.

Not only does the dynamic of Capitalism (the solvent use-value whose diffusion seeps in and under the "iron laws" of value) repeat, in its special way, the general law of social evolution (diffusion of artefacts), but its movement has the same general direction—the socialising of personal power and privilege. The extrinsic, personal character of feudal tithe and tribute is replaced by the intrinsic, impersonal character of contractual exploitation; status, formerly based on personal heredity, becomes more and more an incident of social function; and the more anonymous, less personally autocratic mien of power under Capitalism than under Feudalism stands out in even further contrast with the intensely personal nature of social relations in still earlier times. For it is essentially the dearth of artefacts, the uncushioned nakedness, the rudimentary thinness of social connective tissue, which gives to primitive society the animistic and personal character of social relations and institutions,

where even the elemental qualities of person (age and sex) have social potency, and every person, even to his name and shadow, is rich with majesty and mystery and magic.

The commodity is the cell unit of Capitalism, and the changes in its organic composition—shrinking of the value nucleus relative to the mass of its continuum, use—affects the whole body of Capitalism, by attenuation of the value relations between men. This effect is reinforced by the progressive taxation which moderates differences in final income (that is, evens out the distribution of value itself) in order to maintain the administrative apparatus of Capitalism, the political connective tissues and the sinews of war. To call this State apparatus the property of the capitalist class is a misnomer which reflects our personalised attitude to social forms and process. If it is property at all, it is social property, its operation delegated: the very size and ubiquity of the apparatus compelling the delegation which diffuses power and subordinates privilege to function.

(to be continued) F. EVANS

## HEAD OFFICE MEETINGS

At the A.G.M. last year Com. Kersley and myself pleaded for the continuation of the Sunday evening lectures at H.O. and we were warmly supported in our proposals that we should use H.O. for this purpose every Sunday evening, instead of alternate Sundays. We further suggested that the meetings should start at 7 p.m. instead of being advertised for 7.30 and eventually starting at 8 p.m. or later. What was the result of this? Last year was a fiasco in this respect. A few poorly attended meetings were half heartedly started, and the rest were abandoned. The attitude has become—why go to H.O. Sunday evening if it is so uncertain whether there will be a meeting on.

If we are going to succeed in the lecture form of propaganda—it must be continuous. In pre-war days I used to go to the Doughty St. discussions because they were continuous, and one could rely on there being a meeting as arranged. Every Summer the titles of the winter meetings should be arranged—but this is never done. Nobody knows anything about them until the night of the meeting—yet other organisations can and do arrange lists of winter meetings during the Summer months. I have invitations to give lectures to various organisations and associations as far ahead as next May, and lists of these fixtures will be sent to members concerned.

We have all heard the moan about meet-

ings starting at 7 p.m.—members can't get there in time. Strange enough they can always get to Dennison House to start at 7 p.m. In this case we have to be out by 10 p.m., yet with premises of our own we have to hire Dennison House to hold a meeting to talk to a few party members—rather an expensive adventure.

While in a grumbling mood, it is deplorable how some party members spend (or waste) most of their time in attacking other party members. I scarcely give a lecture or write an article in the *S.S.* or *Forum*, that is not the target of some malicious attack, usually by someone who is almost unacquainted with the aspect of the subject. If the criticism was helpful, it wouldn't matter—but it mostly takes the form of "you don't know what you are talking about, all your facts are wrong and you ought not to be in the party."

If members would blow off their steam against our opponents, instead of arguing so fiercely against one another, we might get somewhere. If we were to centre our attention more on converting the unconverted, and discussing with those who are not so familiar with the party's case our persuasive efforts should reap better reward. It is our task to spread Socialist ideas, to convince those who are not yet socialists. Let us concentrate more on this objective.

H. JARVIS